

Mason's Pharmacy
(Gadsby's Tavern)
132 N. Royal Street
Alexandria, Virginia.

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Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Washington, D. C.

Historic American Buildings Survey
Deles H. Smith, District Officer
1707 Eye St., N.W., Washington, D.C.

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GADSBY'S TAVERN
132 North Royal Street, Alexandria
Virginia

Owner: American Legion

Date of erection: 1752 and 1792

Builder: John Wise (later building)

Present condition: Good

Description:

The tavern, which is now operated as a museum, consists of two adjoining buildings. That to the south is the older and smaller and was recorded by the Survey. It is of brick, laid in Flemish bond, two stories high below a gable roof. The masonry is of considerable distinction, the brick being carefully laid and the windows all spanned by stone flat arches. These are cut to the form of rusticated voussoirs and winged key stones, the exposed surface of the latter being vermiculated in low relief. The string course is also of cut stone.

The facade is five bays with a center door, which is richly trimmed in wood. The frame is composed of flanking fluted Doric pilasters supporting an open pediment into which projects the arched transom of the door. This is trimmed with an archivolt and winged key, and the glazing is of an interlacing design. The door itself is unusual in its panel design, having two tiers of three vertical panels below two horizontal panels at the top.

The main cornice is of wood, above a moulded stone course, and has moulded modillions. On the roof are three dormer windows, centered on the outside and middle windows. These are framed by architraves and capped by pulvinated friezes and pediments. At the head the architrave is broken by a winged key. These sash are six-over-six lights and 8 by 10 inches. The modern sash in the windows below have a similar number of lights, but originally undoubtedly had twelve-over-twelve-light sash.

In plan the building has a narrow central hall, at the left (south) a large room running the full depth of the house, and at the right two small rooms with angle fireplaces. The hall widens toward the rear to allow space for the stair.

The second floor consists of one large room used formerly for balls and assemblies. On the third floor there are three

attic rooms, the flanking rooms being reached through the center one.

The trim of the tavern is exceptionally good and is mostly original. The dados have richly moulded caps and bases but are sheathed rather than paneled. The mantels all have paneled overmantels, that in the south first-floor room being the most elaborate. It has an eared architrave frame supporting a frieze and cornice-shelf. The overmantel panel is framed by a fully moulded eared architrave, against the crossettes of which moulded brackets appear supporting a broken pediment. In the mantel certain alterations have taken place which may have included the removal of consoles and the substitution of a mitred moulding. The whole composition is inept and curiously at variance with the rest of the woodwork of the building.

The mantels in the north rooms and in the ball room are similar in scheme, although the latter are larger in scale and size. The fireplaces in all are framed by eared architraves, above which are long narrow panels below moulded cornice-type shelves. The overmantel panels are also framed by eared architraves. At either side of each mantel, to cover the chimney breast, are a series of vertical panels.

The stair is particularly noteworthy, although not an important feature of the interior. It is of the open-string type with scrolled console brackets and unusually heavy turned balusters. This ascends to the attic.

The newer section of the tavern is three full stories high with an attic and basement and had extensive accommodations for travelers. It faces on Royal Street but has an important frontage on Cameron Street. The facade is less interesting than the side elevation, especially since the removal of the elaborate original doorway during the Victorian period. The building is four bays wide, the door being off-center to the left. The windows on the first and second floors are substantially similar in size and have twelve-over-twelve-light sash, but those on the third floor are reduced in height and have eight-over-eight-light sash. On the roof are three dormers with arched heads and pediment trim.

The masonry of the building is brick, laid carefully in Flemish bond. The brick is large in size and uniform in color and texture. The original jointing was the type known as tuck-and-pat joint, which was described by Batty Langley in his London Prices. It consisted of a regular raked joint against which was run a raised ribbon of white mortar. This, in places, was raised one-sixteenth of an inch or more above the surface of the bricks,

so forming a sort of frame. This is the only example known to the writer in this country. The only section of the jointing which remained in pristine condition was that covered by the woodwork of the Victorian door, the rest being much weathered. There is no trim brick except in the deep flat arches of the windows, which are fauged and laid in white cement.

The wood trim of the exterior was particularly distinguished before the removal of the doorway, which is now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. It is substantially a mate to the doorway on the older part of the building, but with more delicate detail. The main cornice is elaborated with both modillions and dentils. On the side elevation the gable roof is treated as a pediment with a rake mould similar to the cornice. This elevation has a pair of inside end wall chimneys, the stacks of which project above the pediment. There are pairs of windows centered on the shafts. At the rear is a Victorian brick wing which replaced an early low wing, the evidence for which can be seen in the rear wall of the tavern.

In recent years the exterior has been partially restored. The nineteenth-century doorway was removed and a simple arched doorway was substituted. This corresponds to the original door and transom and is built so that the original trim or a reproduction of it can be fitted against it. All window sash is new, the old being stored in the attic. A large part of the main cornice has been rebuilt and the dormer trim has been restored. Restorations on the interior include reproducing the woodwork of the Ball Room and the mantels in the hall and front drawing room on the first floor, all of which was removed by the Metropolitan Museum.

In plan the building now has a hall at the left with a stair hall beyond, and at the right a pair of drawing rooms. Originally the hall was divided into two rooms with angle fireplaces against the south wall. The partition was removed and the chimney altered, perhaps when the Victorian doorway was installed. The plan of the original wing was lost when it was rebuilt, but the evidence points to the fact that there must have been at least one fine room in it, probably the dining room. The evidence for this lies in the elaborate trim of the door from the west parlor on its outside face. The kitchen may have been beyond in the end of the wing. On the three upper floors the plan has not been altered except where the chimney was changed in the south wall. The modern wing covers both west windows, whereas the former wing caused the omission of only one, the northwest window on the west wall.

The trim throughout is excellent, and the form is a scholarly Georgian type. It consists of wood dados with moulded caps and bases, ceiling cornices, and, in the important rooms, paneled

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chimney breasts. The Ball Room is one of the most distinguished rooms of its period in the country. It has a pair of frontispiece mantels on the north wall and a musicians' gallery on the south wall. The paneled dado has a chair rail enriched with strapwork ornament. The main cornice is fully moulded, with a dentil course. All windows have paneled jambs and architraves eared at the top. The mantels are particularly fine in design. The openings are framed by eared architraves on which rest scrolled consoles supporting mantel shelves. Above are single panels framed by eared architraves, below broken serpentine pediments. The pediments have large plain rosettes which may have been intended to be treated with applied ornament. The musicians' gallery is hung from the ceiling joists against the south wall. The posts are turned above the railing, which is ramped at the posts. The balusters are turned to match those in the main stair, which is unpretentious but well designed. For a full discussion of the woodwork of the Ball Room see "An Assembly Room of Washington's Time," T. T. Waterman, in Early American Rooms, Russell Kettell, Editor.

Author: Thomas T. Waterman

Approved: 5/6/41